

PORCUPINE AND LOWER SHEENJEK

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER STUDIES

FINDINGS and MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

PUBLIC MEETINGS: 7:00pm.

Anchorage

Jan. 20 National Park Service Office
540 W 5th Ave.

Fairbanks

Jan. 26 Noel Wien Library
1215 Cowles St.

Fort Yukon
Chalkyitsik

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PERCUPINE RIVER

Study Area

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Miles in miles



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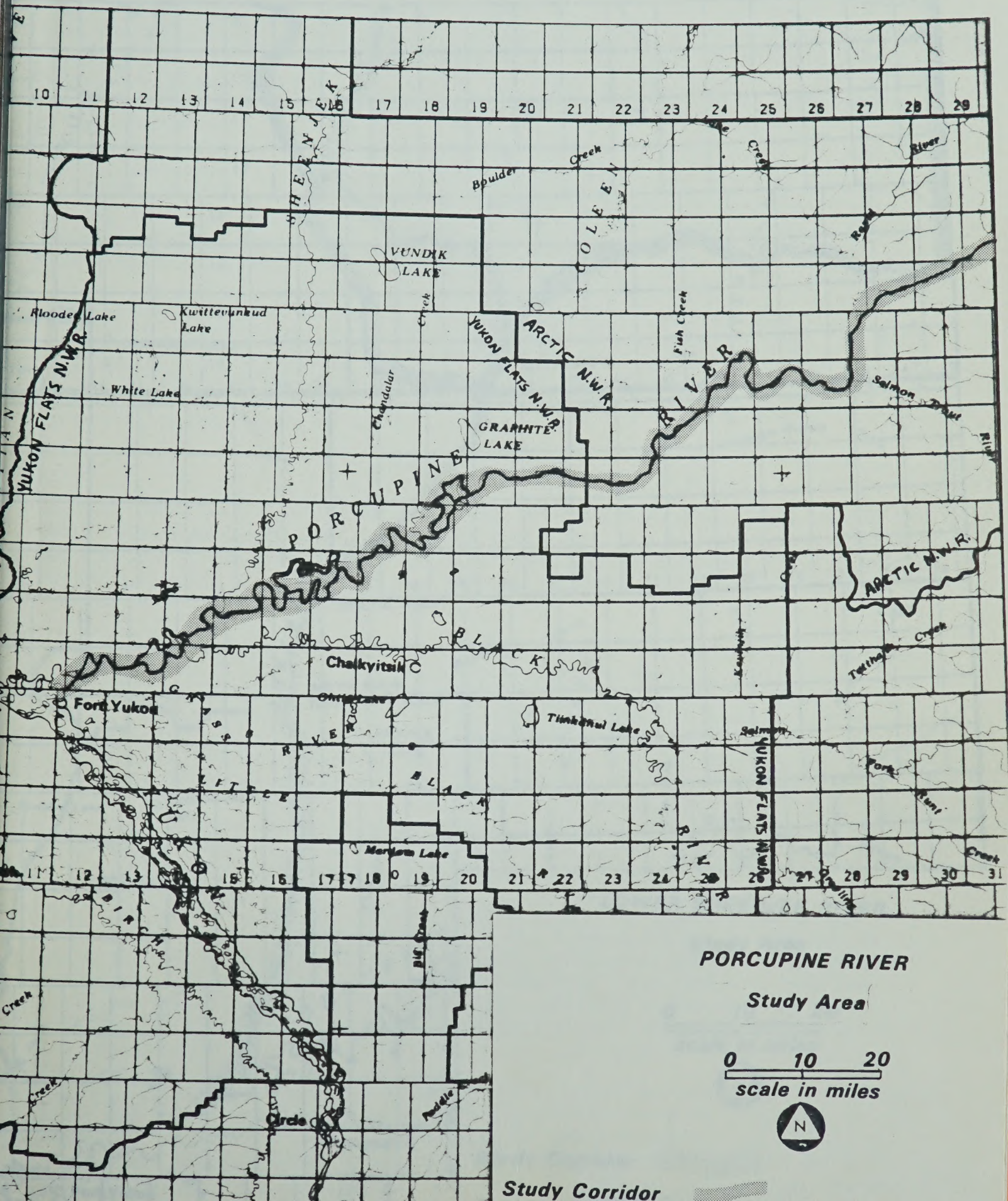
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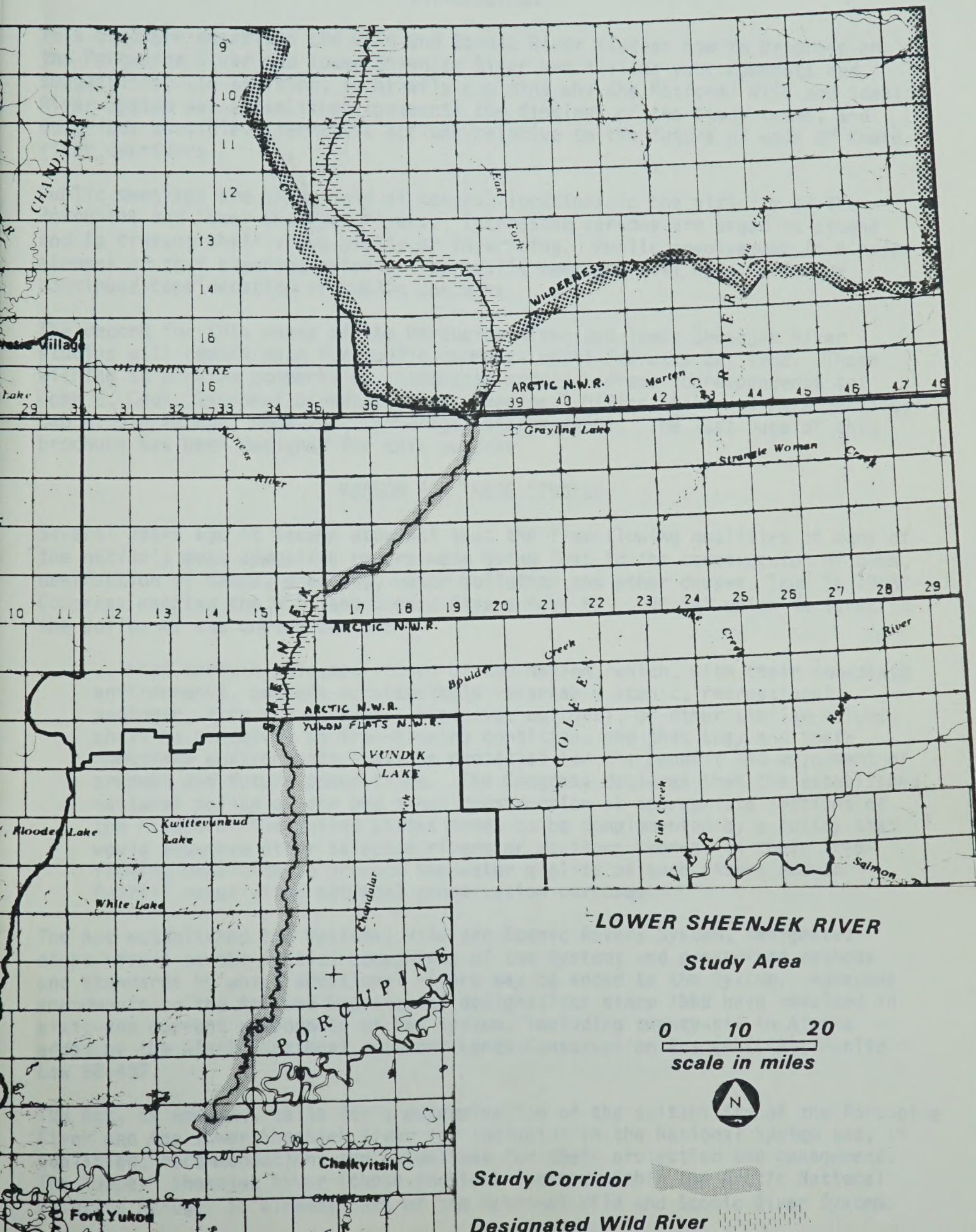
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INTRODUCTION

This brochure describes the Wild and Scenic River studies now in progress on the Porcupine River and lower Sheenjek River and invites your comments and suggestions. In addition, it briefly explains why the National Wild and Scenic River System was established, presents the findings of the study teams, and describes possible alternative actions relative to the future of each of these river corridors.

Public meetings are being held at several locations in the vicinity of the Porcupine and lower Sheenjek Rivers. Interested persons are urged to attend and to present their views orally or in writing. Public involvement is a major element of this planning effort. The public meetings will help to insure continued consideration of public concerns.

The record for this phase of the Porcupine River and lower Sheenjek River studies will remain open for public comments until February 26, 1982. Those wishing to provide comments or statements should address correspondence to: John E. Cook, Regional Director, Alaska Regional Office, National Park Service, 540 W. 5th Avenue, Room 202, Anchorage, Alaska 99501. The last page of this brochure has been designed for this purpose.

REASON FOR THESE STUDIES

Several years ago it became apparent that the free-flowing qualities of many of the nation's most appealing rivers were being lost to the construction of dams, destruction of banks, dredging, water pollution and other causes. Thus in 1968 Congress enacted the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, P. L. 90-542 which declares it the policy of the United States:

...that certain selected rivers of the Nation, which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Congress declares that the established national policy of dam and other construction at appropriate sections of the rivers of the United States needs to be complemented by a policy that would preserve other selected rivers or sections thereof in their free-flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes.

The Act established the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; designated eight rivers as the initial components of the System; and prescribed methods and standards by which additional rivers may be added to the System. Numerous amendments to the Act and Secretarial designations since 1968 have resulted in sixty-one current components of the System, including twenty-six in Alaska added by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Public Law 96-487.

The Act, as amended, calls for a determination of the suitability of the Porcupine River and the lower Sheenjek River for inclusion in the National System and, if qualified, recommendations and guidelines for their protection and management. The "upper" Sheenjek River (those portions located within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge) is already part of the National Wild and Scenic River System.

HOW THE STUDIES ARE BEING CONDUCTED

The Porcupine River and the lower Sheenjek River study teams are composed of representatives of Federal and State agencies and Native interests. Federal agencies represented on both of the teams include the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service. State agencies include the Department of Fish and Game; Division of Forest, Land and Water Management; and the Division of Parks. Native organizations include Gwitchaa Zhee Corporation, Doyon Limited and Tanana Chiefs Conference. The Alaska Cooperative Fishery Research Unit is an active participant on the Porcupine River team. In addition numerous other Federal, State, and local agencies or interests are providing technical input.

The studies were initiated in June 1981 with announcements sent to many agencies and organizations as well as a news release. In July canoe trips down both the Porcupine and Sheenjek Rivers were made by some members of the study teams. An individual draft report/environmental impact statement describing the resources, the recommended action and the alternatives considered will be prepared for each of the river studies following the January/February public meetings and be circulated for review by June 1982. After the document has been reviewed by public and private interests, the report will be revised as necessary and submitted through the President to Congress.

ARE THESE RIVERS ELIGIBLE FOR INCLUSION IN THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM

The study teams' first major task was to determine which portions of the study segments, if any, meet the eligibility criteria for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

These criteria are that a river must:

- * Possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geological, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values.
- * Be in a substantially free-flowing condition
- * Be long enough to provide a meaningful experience
- * Normally contain sufficient volume of water to provide full enjoyment of water related outdoor recreation activities
- * Contain high water quality, or be restorable to that condition

Porcupine River

The study team determined that the 212 mile study segment generally meets the five criteria. However, the "outstandingly remarkable values" are not equally distributed along the entire river.

The Porcupine River study area has many notable characteristics:

- * The river as a major travel corridor fills an important chapter in the history of Alaska and the Yukon Territory. Most notable is its role during the heyday of trapping and the activities of the Hudson Bay Company.
- * A number of historic cabins and settlements are located along its shores.
- * The scenery on the upper river, particularly within the constricted canyon walls, ramparts and towers of the Upper and Lower Ramparts, is impressive and uncommon. The scenery along the lower river as it winds through the dense spruce forest and bogs of the Yukon Flats is not as unique but is pleasing to the eye.
- * There are excellent boating opportunities, for both power and float boats.
- * The river corridor, including its canyon walls and many terraces, provides an unusually good outdoor laboratory for the study and interpretation of geologic processes and stream formation
- * Archaeologic sites have been found in the Old Crow drainage and similar sites may exist along the Porcupine.
- * The river canyon areas provide nesting habitat for raptors including the endangered peregrine falcon.
- * The river continues to serve as an important regional transportation mode.
- * The numerous sand and gravel bars provide opportunities for camping.

Lower Sheenjek River

The study team determined that the study segments on the lower Sheenjek River meet the five criteria. However, the "outstandingly remarkable values" are not equally distributed along the entire study river and to some people are not as evident on the lower river as on the upper river. Although of different character the lower river is a continuation and complement of the upper river which is already classified as a National Wild River.

The lower Sheenjek River study area has several notable characteristics:

- * Excellent boating opportunities, particularly for float boats along its entire length and power boats on its lower portion.
- * Habitat for waterfowl, moose, grizzly bear, and numerous fur-bearing species. The concentration of grizzly bears, attracted to the river when the salmon are spawning, is reputedly much higher than on other rivers in the area.
- * Scenic variety as the river flows through timber covered rolling hills and in its final miles as it meanders through thickly vegetated flat lands.
- * Free-flowing, unpolluted waters.
- * Pristine, essentially undeveloped shoreline

- * Numerous sand beaches providing opportunity for camping.
- * Support of individuals and families still pursuing a traditional Alaska lifestyle centered around trapping.
- * A major chum salmon spawning area.

HOW SHOULD THE RIVERS BE CLASSIFIED

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides that rivers shall be classified as wild, scenic or recreational. A river (or portion of a river) is placed in the classification which most accurately describes its existing condition. The three classes are defined as follows:

1. Wild River Areas - Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and water unpolluted.
2. Scenic River Areas - Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.
3. Recreational River Areas - Those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past.

Porcupine River

The general consensus of the study team was that if the Porcupine River were to be designated, it should be classified as "wild" from the United States - Canada border to the mouth of Sucker River. This is warranted at the present time because of the total lack of roads and the essentially undeveloped character of the shoreline.

The balance of the river, a total of about 10 miles should be classified as "scenic". This is due to the presence of the Sucker River Road and the concentrated air traffic and other activity associated with nearby Fort Yukon.

Lower Sheenjek River

The appropriate classification for the lower Sheenjek River area, based upon its existing condition, is "wild." All portions of the Sheenjek River outside of the study area are already designated as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and classified as "wild."

LATERAL BOUNDARIES

If the decision is made to include all or a portion of either the Porcupine River or the lower Sheenjek River in the National System, then it will be necessary to establish lateral boundaries. In order to adequately protect the river environment the boundary should include, as a minimum, the visual foreground. For previously designated rivers in Alaska, Congress has set a limit on lateral boundaries that will not exceed an average of 640 acres per river mile on both sides of the river (i. e. not exceed an average width of one-half

mile on either side of the river bank). Congress also indicated that the designated corridors would not include any State or privately owned lands. It is anticipated that the same provisions would be applied by Congress to future designated rivers in Alaska.

Specific boundaries would be determined by the land managing agency after inclusion of the river in the National System.

WHAT ARE THE IDENTIFIED ALTERNATIVES

A few options have been identified for the future of both the Porcupine River corridor and the lower Sheenjek River corridor varying from non-inclusion to inclusion of all or portions in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The fact that a river has been found to meet the criteria and is qualified for inclusion, does not necessarily mean that it is feasible or desirable or in the public interest to be added. Also, the decision can be made to add or not to add any portion of either of these two river areas to the National System.

Porcupine River

Alternative 1. Non-Inclusion/No Change

The river and its immediate environment would be managed under existing Federal, State, and private authorities. Federal laws and regulations pertaining to management of National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska would provide continued management guidance on Federal lands without overlying law or regulation to provide additional protection or special management emphasis to the river corridor. As owner of the river and river bed the State would continue to regulate those activities affecting water quality, streamflow, and use of the stream bank. Under this alternative the Federal lands within the river corridor would be managed no differently than other Refuge lands in the Arctic and Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuges. There are presently no known proposals that would result in significant change to the present character of the river or adjacent lands particularly since management decisions and potential future land use changes must be compatible with the purposes of the Refuges. However, it is possible that the character of the river corridor could be significantly changed by development that is not incompatible with fish and wildlife resources and other purposes of the Refuges, but would have impact on the scenery or other values of the river area. For example change could stem from the discovery and development of resources outside the corridor. The Porcupine River presently serves as an important transportation mode and the river or its adjacent lands could potentially be developed to serve an expanded role as the location for a road or pipeline. The river could also be subject to impoundment or water diversions.

Alternative 2. Inclusion/Entire River

Under this alternative, Congress would designate the Porcupine River from the U. S.-Canada border to its confluence with the Yukon River. Responsibility for administration would be assigned to the Fish and Wildlife Service. As the administering agency the Fish and Wildlife Service would be responsible for working closely with the State of Alaska and private land holders in the corridor in cooperative planning and management.

The Fish and Wildlife Service would have two years after designation in which to work with the State and the Native organizations to prepare a detailed management plan for the area and determine the location of lateral boundary lines. The privately owned lands, including the large acreage holdings of Doyon Limited, Gwitchaa Zhee Corporation and Chalkyitsik Village Corporation, would not be contained within the boundaries of the Wild and Scenic River area and these lands would not be directly affected by the management plan unless desired. The management plan would be formulated so as to protect and maintain the environment of the boundaried river corridor in a condition consistent with the provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The management plan would provide a basis for cooperative management of the corridor to protect scenic, recreational and other related values, to protect historical values, to protect private property and interests, and to deal with potential conflicts among river users and uses. Under this alternative Federal lands within the corridor would still probably not be managed noticeably different than other Refuge lands. However, management emphasis would be on protecting the river's values including its esthetic, scenic, historic, archaeologic and scientific features. This would not preclude all forms of change or development within the river corridor, but would strongly influence the degree or manner in which future change or development occurs.

No dams or other major water developments would be permitted. Transportation or utility systems would be allowed in the corridor, but planning for them would necessarily consider the river area's values and procedures to avoid unnecessary damage to these values. For example, while transportation or utility modes could be allowed to cross over, under or through the river corridor, they probably would not be located within the corridor for any appreciable distances.

Alternative 3. Inclusion/Upper 82 Miles

Under this alternative Congress would designate only that portion of the Porcupine River within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Some private land, including Native allotments and a Native group site, is located along this portion of the river, but as stated in Alternative 2, private lands would not be contained within the wild river corridor. This segment does not contain the principle blocks of surface estate owned by Doyon Limited, Gwitchaa Zhee Corporation and Chalkyitsik Village Corporation. Responsibility for administration would be assigned to the Fish and Wildlife Service and a management plan for this upper segment of the river would be prepared.

Alternative 4. Inclusion/Two Separate Segments

This alternative calls for Congressional action to designate the upper segment of approximately 123 miles and a middle segment of approximately 25 river miles. This represents all of the Porcupine River within the United States except the large block of Gwitchaa Zhee Corporation and Doyon Limited owned lands around Fort Yukon and the large block of Chalkyitsik Village Corporation and Doyon Limited owned lands above the confluence with the Sheenjek River. Responsibility for administration would be assigned to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Lower Sheenjek River

Alternative 1. Non-Inclusion/No Change

The river and its immediate environment would be managed under existing Federal, State, and private authorities. Federal laws and regulations pertaining to management of National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska would provide continued management guidance on Federal lands without overlying law or regulation to provide additional protection or special management emphasis of the river corridor. Normal State administrative policy and planning are expected to eventually be applied on the State selected lands in the corridor.

Under this alternative the Federal lands within the river corridor would be managed no differently than other Refuge lands. There are presently no known proposals that would result in significant change to the present character of the river or adjacent lands, particularly since management decisions and potential future land use changes must be compatible with the purposes of the Refuge. Although there are no known existing proposals, it is possible that the character of the lower river corridor could be significantly changed by future development that is not incompatible with fish and wildlife resources and other purposes of the Refuge, but would have impact on the scenery or other values of the river area. For example change could result from the discovery and development of resources outside the corridor. The lower Sheenjek River corridor could be used as the location for a future road, pipeline, or other transportation or utility mode. Future uses of the State selected portion of the corridor could widely vary and would be largely dependent on State administrative policy and the land use classification applied to these lands.

Also this alternative will not assure that the lower river area will be managed under objectives consistent with the objectives for the upper portions of the river already included in the National Wild and Scenic River System.

Alternative 2. Inclusion/Entire Study Segment

Under this alternative Congress would designate the portion of the study segment within the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge (lower 90 miles of the river) to the National System under Fish and Wildlife Service Administration. The Secretary of the Interior would add the balance of the study segment (the 34 mile segment currently on State selected lands) under State administration upon receipt of acceptable application from the Governor.

The administering agencies would have three years after designation to prepare a detailed management plan for the area and determine the location of lateral boundary lines. The management plan would be formulated so as to protect and maintain the environment of the bounded river corridor in a condition consistent with the provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The management plan would provide a basis for cooperative management of the corridor to protect scenic, recreational and other related values, to protect private property and interests, and to deal with conflicts among river users. Under this alternative Federal lands within the corridor would still probably not be managed noticeably different than other Refuge lands. However, management emphasis would be on protecting the river's values including its esthetic, scenic, historic, archaeologic and scientific features. This would not preclude all forms of change or development within the river corridor, but would strongly influence the degree or manner in which future change or development occurs.

No dams or other major water developments would be permitted. Transportation or utility systems would be allowed in the corridor, but planning for them would have to consider the river area's values and procedures to avoid unnecessary damage to these values. For example, while transportation or utility modes could be allowed to cross over, under or through the river corridor, they probably would not be located within the corridor for any appreciable distances. Access to private lands along the river would not be affected.

This action would complement the level of protection extended to the portions of the river outside the study area, which are already part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Alternative 3. Inclusion/Segment within Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge

Under this alternative Congress would designate only the lower 90 miles of the Sheenjek River to the National System. Responsibility for administration would be assigned to the Fish and Wildlife Service and a management plan for this lower segment of the river would be prepared. The 34 mile segment located on State selected lands will likely be planned for and managed under existing State law and policy. Presumably the State selected section of the river corridor could be managed for any number of purposes including maintaining the status quo or disposing to private ownership.

Alternative 4. Inclusion/Segment Lying Within State Selected Lands

This alternative calls for the Secretary of the Interior to add the 34 mile segment to the National System under State administration, upon receipt of acceptable application from the Governor. This action would add to the National System that segment of the Sheenjek River lying between two segments of the river already part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

MAILER FOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

In the space provided below, you are invited to indicate which management option you prefer for one or both of the study rivers or propose other alternatives for consideration and provide an explanation for your choice.

You may also wish to comment on the findings concerning the criteria, classification and boundary, or other matters affecting the Porcupine or lower Sheenjek Wild and Scenic River studies.

The record for receiving comments on this phase of the studies will remain open until February 26, 1982.

Fold and mail. No stamp is necessary.

COMMENTS

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